

to be from all around the world. We have to learn to live in ways that we never imagined, with people we couldn't have possibly understood just a few years ago. But what we have to do is what we've always had to do, widen the circle of opportunity, deepen the meaning of freedom, strengthen the bonds of our Union.

And when you go home tonight, you think about that. And you ask yourself, which party is more likely to do that. I rest my case.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:48 p.m. at the National Museum of Women in the Arts. In his remarks, he referred to Senator J. Robert Kerrey, chair, Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee.

### **Remarks on the Enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization**

*March 20, 1998*

Thank you. Thank you very much, Secretary Albright, General Shelton, General Sandler, Mr. Berger, Senator Roth, to the members and representatives of the Joint Chiefs, members of the diplomatic corps, and other interested citizens, many of whom have held high positions in the national security apparatus of this country and the military of our country. We're grateful for everyone's presence here today.

I especially want to thank the Members of the Senate who are here. I thank Senator Roth, the chairman of the NATO observer group, Senator Moynihan, Senator Smith, Senator Levin, Senator Lugar, Senator Robb, and Senator Thurmond. Your leadership and that of Senators Lott, Daschle, Helms, and Biden and others in this Chamber has truly, as the Secretary of State said, made this debate a model of bipartisan dialog and action.

The Senate has held more than a dozen hearings on this matter. We have worked very closely with the Senate NATO observer group. And I must say, I was immensely gratified when the Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted 16 to 2 in support of enlargement.

Now, in the coming days the full Senate will act on this matter of critical importance to our national security. The admission of Po-

land, Hungary, and the Czech Republic to NATO will be a very important milestone in building the kind of world we want for the 21st century.

As has been said, I first proposed NATO enlargement 4 years ago, when General Joulwan was our commander in Brussels. Many times since, I've had the opportunity to speak on this issue. Now a final decision is at hand, and now it is important that all the American people focus on this matter closely. For this is one of those rare moments when we have within our grasp the opportunity to actually shape the future, to make the new century safer and more secure and less unstable than the one we are leaving.

We can truly be present at a new creation. When President Truman signed the North Atlantic Treaty 49 years ago next month, he expressed the goal of its founders in typically simple and straightforward language: to preserve their present peaceful situation and to protect it in the future. The dream of the generation that founded NATO was of a Europe whole and free. But the Europe of their time was lamentably divided by the Iron Curtain. Our generation can realize their dream. It is our opportunity and responsibility to do so, to create a new Europe undivided, democratic, and at peace for the very first time in all history.

Forging a new NATO in the 21st century will help to fulfill the commitment and the struggle that many of you in this room engaged in over the last 50 years. NATO can do for Europe's East what it did for Europe's West: protect new democracies against aggression, prevent a return to local rivalries, create the conditions in which prosperity can flourish.

In January of 1994, on my first trip to Europe for the NATO summit, we did take the lead in proposing a new NATO for a new era. First, by strengthening our alliance to preserve its core mission of self-defense, while preparing it to take on the new challenges to our security and to Europe's stability; second, by reaching out to new partners and taking in new members from among Europe's emerging democracies; and third, by forging a strong and cooperative relationship between NATO and Russia.

Over the past 4 years, persistently and pragmatically, we have put this strategy into place. NATO has shifted to smaller, more flexible forces better prepared to provide for our defense in this new era, but also trained and equipped for other contingencies. Its military power remains so unquestioned that it was the only force capable of stopping the fighting in Bosnia. NATO signed the Founding Act with Moscow, joining Russia and history's most successful alliance in common cause for a peaceful, democratic, undivided Europe. We signed a charter to build cooperation between NATO and Ukraine. We created the Partnership For Peace as a path to full NATO membership for some, and a strong and lasting link to the alliance for others. Today, the Partnership For Peace has exceeded its mission beyond the wildest dreams of those of us who started it. It has more than three dozen members.

Now we're on the threshold of bringing new members into NATO. The alliance's enlargement will make America safer by making NATO stronger, adding new forces and new allies that can share our security burdens. Let me be very clear: NATO's core mission will remain the same—the defense of the territory of its members. The addition of new members will strengthen and enhance that mission. In pursuing enlargement, we have made sure not to alter NATO's core function or its ability to defend America and Europe's security.

Now I urge this Senate to do the same, and in particular, to impose no constraints on NATO's freedom of action, its military decisionmaking, or its ability to respond quickly and effectively to whatever challenges may arise. NATO's existing treaty and the way it makes defense and security decisions have served our Nation's security well for half a century.

In the same way, the addition of these new members will help NATO meet new challenges to our security. In Bosnia, for example, Polish, Czech, and Hungarian soldiers serve alongside our own with skill and professionalism. Remember, this was one of the largest, single operational deployments of American troops in Europe since World War II. It was staged from a base in Tazsar, Hungary. It simply would not have happened as

swiftly, smoothly, or safely without the active help and support of Hungary.

As we look toward the 21st century, we're looking at other new security challenges as well—the spread of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile technology, terrorism and the potential for high-tech attacks on our information systems. NATO must be prepared to meet and defeat this new generation of threats, to act flexibly and decisively under American leadership. With three new members in our ranks, NATO will be better able to meet those goals as well.

Enlargement also will help to make Europe more stable. Already, the very prospect of membership has encouraged nations throughout the region to accelerate reforms, resolve disputes, and improve cooperation.

Now, let me emphasize what I've said many times before and what all NATO allies have committed to: NATO's first new members should not be its last. Keeping the doors open to all of Europe's new democracies will help to ensure that enlargement benefits the security of the entire region, not just the first three new members.

At last summer's summit in Madrid, NATO agreed to examine the process of enlargement at our next summit in 1999. Neither NATO nor my administration has made any decisions or any commitments about when the next invitations for membership should be extended, or to whom. I have consulted broadly with Congress on decisions about the admissions of the first three members. I pledge to do the same before any future decisions are made. And of course, any new members would also require the advice and the consent of the United States Senate.

For these reasons, I urge, in the strongest terms, the Senate to reject any effort to impose an artificial pause on the process of enlargement. Such a mandate is unnecessary and, I believe, unwise. If NATO is to remain strong, America's freedom to lead it must be unfettered and our freedom to cooperate with our other partners in NATO must remain unfettered. A unilateral freeze on enlargement would reduce our own country's flexibility and, perhaps even more important, our leverage, our ability to influence our partners. It would fracture NATO's open-door consensus; it would undermine further

reforms in Europe's democracies; it would draw a new and potentially destabilizing line, at least temporarily, in Europe.

There are other steps we must take to prevent that division from reemerging. We must continue to strengthen the Partnership For Peace with our many friends in Europe. We need to give even more practical expression to the agreements between NATO and Russia and NATO and Ukraine, turning words into deeds. With Russia and other countries, we must continue to reduce our nuclear stockpiles—and we thank you, Senator Lugar, for your leadership on that—to combat the dangers of proliferation, to lower conventional arms ceilings all across Europe. And all of us together must help the Bosnian people to finish the job of bringing a lasting peace to their country. If you think about where we were just a year ago in Bosnia, not to mention 2 years ago, not to mention 1995, no one could have believed we would be here today. It would not have happened had it not been for NATO, the Partnership For Peace allies, the Russians, all of those who have come together and joined hands to end the bloodiest conflict in Europe since the Second World War.

Now we have to finish what America started 4 years ago, welcoming Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic into our alliance. If you look around at who is in the room today, you can see that they are more than willing to be a good partner. They will make NATO stronger; they will make Europe safer; and in so doing, they will make America and our young people more secure. They will make it less likely that the young men and women in uniform who serve under General Shelton and the other generals here, and their successors in the 21st century, will have to fight and die because of problems in Europe.

A new NATO can extend the blessings of freedom and security in a new century. With the help of our allies, the support of the Senate, the strength of our continued commitment, we can bring Europe together—not by force of arms, but by possibilities of peace. That is the promise of this moment. And we must seize it.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:46 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. Henry H. Shelton, USA, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and Maj. Gen. Roger Sandler, USA (Ret.), executive director, Reserve Officers Association.

### **Statement on Signing the Examination Parity and Year 2000 Readiness for Financial Institutions Act**

*March 20, 1998*

Today I am pleased to sign into law H.R. 3116, the "Examination Parity and Year 2000 Readiness for Financial Institutions Act."

This legislation calls upon Federal financial regulatory agencies to conduct seminars and provide guidance for financial institutions on the implications of the Year 2000 problem. It also extends to the Office of Thrift Supervision and the National Credit Union Administration statutory authority, similar to that of other Federal banking agencies, to examine the operations of contractors that perform services for thrifts and credit unions. These services include data processing and the maintenance of computer systems that are used to track everything from day-to-day deposit and loan activity to portfolio management.

Many thrifts and credit unions, particularly smaller ones, rely heavily on the services of outside contractors for the processing of critical business applications. This legislation will assist Federal regulators in better understanding the Year 2000 risks to which thrifts and credit unions may be exposed and will bolster efforts to work with them to ensure that they will be able to continue to provide services to their customers without disruption.

The Year 2000 problem is one of the great challenges of the Information Age in which we live. My Administration is committed to working with the Congress and the private sector to ensure that we minimize Year 2000-related disruptions in the lives of the American people.

**William J. Clinton**

The White House,  
March 20, 1998.